

Marketing Your SWCD

Marketing is the lifeblood of any business, organization, or group and is critical in gaining visibility and credibility. SWCDs cannot grow, flourish or live without marketing. Once you understand how to market effectively, you'll enhance your chances for positive name recognition, being viewed as an expert in the field of conservation, and hopefully increasing meeting/workshop attendance,

For many of us, marketing is a real mystery. We don't know exactly how it works. We're not sure what will be most effective for us. And we sure have no idea where to start. The good news is that the process of developing and implementing a marketing plan for your SWCD is not nearly as difficult as it may seem. The core of marketing is very simple: It's about communicating the value of what you offer to those who can benefit the most.

Marketing impact can be greatly improved by using multiple marketing channels. Prospects will likely become supporters and participants if they, for example: read about our services in the newspaper, attend a seminar, take home a brochure, and visit the county SWCD web site. The further you can "stretch your marketing dollars" to reach your target market in multiple channels, the higher the impact of your marketing message.

Let's take a look at some basic Marketing Principles you should consider:

- Marketing is repetitious. To create impact, build rapport and establish relationships with your prospects, your marketing must be repetitious. Your name or message may need to be heard 5-7 times before you can anticipate a response.
- Marketing must be performed continuously, not infrequently. Avoid marketing in spurts.
- Marketing creates impact gradually – not immediately.
- Marketing sells solutions. People are more interested in what SWCDs can do for them to help solve a problem.
- Marketing involves targeting specific individuals or groups of people.

Let's now take a look at various Marketing Strategies you could utilize. It is not critical that you incorporate all these into your marketing plan. As a board, discuss these options and decide where you want to put your efforts. You may also need to change your approach after a few years if what you are doing does not seem to be producing the necessary results.

PHYSICAL OFFICE

- Outdoor signage and indoor directional signs (if needed).
- Welcoming entrance.
- Staff easily seen from the entrance to greet the visitors
- Guest sitting / waiting area.
- Brochures and pamphlets displayed for easy access
- Handicap accessible with walkways at least 36 inches wide.
- Answering machine for when the office is closed or staff is not available.

OFFICE OPERATIONS

- Consistent way of answering the telephone
- Consistent local SWCD letterhead for letters, FAX cover sheets, envelopes, etc.
- Business cards for staff
- Informational brochures and pamphlets
- Telephone system – voice mail, directional tree, etc.
- Name tags for staff
- Shirts with local SWCD name and/or logo
- Effective use of e-mail among staff and supervisors

NETWORKING AND EVENT PARTICIPATION

- High quality booth or display at 4-H Fair, Flower & Patio Show, field days, trade shows, Ag. Days, lake association gatherings, Chamber of Commerce events, annual meetings (Extension Service, Co-op, seed and fertilizer dealers, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Farm Credit Services, etc.)
- Attend and/or serve on various community committees – Chamber of Commerce Natural Resources Committee, Extension Service Agriculture Committee, lake association boards, river watch, tree planting, community clean-up, drainage board, etc.
- Offer to give presentations for service clubs and organizations
- Sponsor or co-sponsor events, seminars and training programs

DIRECT MAIL

- Newsletters, special promotion or tree sale letters, flyers, etc.
- Obtain information (name, address, phone number, and e-mail address) from every person who attends any of your programs. This should be kept in an excel file on your computer with specific columns for each event so that participation can be tracked. A sample template is located on the State Home Page. Information can then be mailed or e-mailed to these individuals.
- Utilizing a mail service, SWCDs can send out information to a specific group of individuals based on location, homeowner vs. tenant, recent home purchaser, etc.
- Consider using e-mail rather than the regular mail to reach your clients, if they are agreeable. This will greatly reduce postage costs.

WEB SITE

- An effective site can help build awareness and credibility for your SWCD
- Keep it up-dated and change the information periodically
- Develop an easy to remember URL or Domain Name
- Some home computers are older and will have trouble downloading a lot of detailed pictures
- On the home page of your site be sure to include the office phone number, address, FAX number, and an e-mail address
- Include links of other related agencies and organizations and ask others to include your SWCD link on their site. Examples include: surveyor, NRCS, Extension Service, drainage board, builders associations, FSA, Farm Credit Services, local Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever, etc.
- Keep it simple to use with easy access back to the home page

MEDIA

- The first critical requirement is to develop a working relationship with key contacts
- Television and Radio
 - Public service announcements
 - If being interviewed, provide background information and a possible list of questions to the reporter that could be asked of you
 - Consider giving them some free items (trees, meal tickets, etc.) to give away to listeners while they are mentioning your event
 - If being interviewed, it is critical to give accurate information and advice, which will help you become known as an expert
- Phone Book
 - Determine the best location(s) to be listed
 - Work with county officials to try to get multiple listings
- Newspaper and Magazine
 - An article and press release with a photograph gains more attention than a paid advertisement. Information printed under the photograph is the most often read part of the article or press release
 - Be sure to send information to a specific person (not just to the editor, for example)
 - Try to include something periodically (bi-weekly, monthly, etc.)
 - Submit articles for other business and organization newsletters
 - Give accurate information and advice, which will help you become known as an expert
- Road Signs and Billboards
 - Be sure to first review all county signage policies
 - Big letters and numbers are critical, especially if the vehicles are traveling at a high rate of speed.
 - Keep the information as simple as possible to convey the message

GIVE AWAY ADVERTISING

- Everyone likes to receiving free items, so if you plan to purchase these for distribution, be sure to include the SWCD name, office phone number, and/or web site address, if appropriate
- Examples of items are: pencils, pens, refrigerator magnets, flyers, buttons, stickers, hats, shirts, mugs, date books, fly swatters, rulers, yard sticks, etc.

Every year it is important that the SWCD board reviews the marketing efforts for the past twelve months to see what worked and what may need to be changed. As mentioned earlier it takes time to develop name-recognition and to see positive results. It will not happen over night, so be patient. Marketing is critical to all corporations, agencies, and organizations, so it should be a part of your yearly strategic planning.